

Xerox and ENERGY STAR® Labeling

When most people think about energy use in the workplace they consider lighting, heating and air conditioning. There is, however, another very significant energy sink: office equipment, including computers, printers, copiers, fax machines, and scanners. Office equipment currently accounts for roughly seven percent of all commercial sector electricity and is the fast growing electric load in the business world. EPA's ENERGY STAR® Office Equipment Labeling Program is working to increase the energy efficiency of such equipment by encouraging manufacturers to market energy-efficient products. One of the first companies to sign on to this program was Xerox, and they did so with printers.

According to Stephen Dunn, Xerox's Manager of Environmental Technology, the company's decision to get involved in EPA's labeling program made good corporate sense for two reasons. First, Xerox has a long history of working to improve corporate environmental performance. In the 1970s, Xerox introduced a copier with resource conservation features such as two-sided copying and energy-saving modes. In 1980, the company established its Corporate Environment, Health and Safety Department, and in 1990 it initiated its Environmental Leadership Program for Resource Conservation, Waste Reduction, and Design for the Environment Initiatives. Xerox's Corporate Environmental Policy echoes the company's focus on such issues, stating, in part, that it is "committed to designing, manufacturing, distributing, and marketing products and processes to optimize resource utilization and minimize environmental impact." The ENERGY STAR Labeling program fit in well with Xerox's corporate philosophy and actions, and participating in the program gave Xerox an opportunity to re-visit and re-double its commitment to enhancing the energy efficiency of its products.

The second reason for Xerox's interest in the program concerned the competition. Other printer manufacturers had expressed interest in manufacturing energy-saving models and, in the early 1990s, were already in discussions with EPA about what type of program to establish. Xerox wanted to make sure its products remained competitive with other printer manufacturers and felt that one way to do so was to be at the table with its competitors and EPA to provide its perspective on the evolving program.

EPA's printer program was launched in January 1993. The seven original signatories, including Xerox, represented 80 percent of the U.S. printer market. To earn the right to claim the ENERGY STAR label for their printers, these companies had to ensure that the machines automatically entered a low power mode of 15-45 watts after a period of inactivity of between 15-60 minutes (where in the range the printer falls depends on its speed).

In April of that year, shortly after the printer program launch, President Clinton issued Executive Order (EO) 12845, requiring the entire federal government to purchase printers, microcomputers (PCs) and monitors that met the ENERGY STAR criteria. With the federal government being such an important client for Xerox, this order made the company's partnership with EPA even more valuable of an asset.

Xerox also viewed the EO as a “wake-up call,” says Dunn. “If it could happen with printers, it could happen to other types of equipment, so it made sense for us to work towards improving the energy efficiency of some of our other lines of office equipment.” The potential impact of an EO, however, was certainly not the only reason Xerox started exploring such improvements. As was the case for printers, increasing the energy efficiency their products meshed with Xerox’s corporate culture

Since the issuance of the federal EO, a number of states have followed suit issuing their own EO’s requiring the purchase of certain types of office equipment that meet the ENERGY STAR criteria. Such actions have further cemented Xerox’s efforts to improve the energy efficiency of its products and have added to the company’s competitive edge when it comes to capturing lucrative state procurement contracts.

Currently, Xerox offers not only ENERGY STAR labeled printers, but also copiers, faxes and multi-function devices (which can print, fax, and copy). Like printers, these other devices must meet program criteria for energy efficiency. For example, ENERGY STAR copiers go into a low power mode and then shut off automatically after 30-90 minutes of inactivity, depending on copier size and speed. Large copiers are also preset to make double-sided copies, which saves paper and energy. The paper connection is especially important since it takes ten times more energy to produce a sheet of paper than to copy an image onto it.

Dunn is “very impressed with the way EPA and the industry has been able to work through difficult issues and come to agreement” in developing and implementing the labeling program. And he feels that had the program been regulatory, as opposed to voluntary, it wouldn’t have worked nearly as well. “EPA was flexible and gave us adequate time to discuss potential changes with our customers, get their input, and gain their support before actually making the changes -- without customer acceptance, we wouldn’t have participated.”

This case-study first appeared in an article written by Eric Jay Dolin, in the Pollution Prevention Review, entitled "Case Studies: EPA's Voluntary P2 Programs Pay Off" (Winter 1998, Vol. 8, No. 1: 15-26).